

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 18
Number 2 *Horizons*

Article 8

Spring 5-1-1998

A Passion for His Work

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Recommended Citation

Harrington, Julie (1998) "A Passion for His Work," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 18 : No. 2 , Article 8.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol18/iss2/8>

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A PASSION FOR HIS WORK

Mary Jones is the type of person who claims that she sat next to you in half of her high school classes, but you can't recall ever seeing her face before. It was her shyness that kept her from being recognized—at least, from being recognized for what she really is.

You know the type, right? All her life, she seemed to have a natural ability to blend into the background like a piece of furniture. She's the kind of girl no guy would ever ask to dance, the kind every cheerleader made fun of and then asked for her help on the math homework when no one was looking. Well, Mary Jones was that girl; I was the cheerleader type.

Maybe that's why I didn't worry when my husband hired her as his secretary. After all, Mary was a plain, mousy woman. Not at all like me. I didn't worry when he started working late on special projects or when he went out of town on business trips. After all, he'd done those things before.

What he hadn't done before was stash credit card receipts in his glove compartment for two, first-class tickets to Rome. He also had never hidden a diamond ring in his sock drawer either. Imagine a man his age running around town with his secretary while his wife and kids wait at home. If it's one thing I never thought my husband was it's a walking cliché. I guess twenty-five years of marriage meant nothing to him.

And to take that little wallflower to Rome... Rome! I've always wanted to go there. In fact, he promised we'd go there someday. I always thought he meant

together. But then I saw *them* together: late lunches, secretive glances, and those oh-so smug smiles. Do you know he even used our names on the tickets? The nerve.

As the months passed, he began to tell me how great Mary was. She was the first one in the office and the last one out. He said she'd become part of the office... like a typewriter or a copier, I guess. Then there where the times she came to the house.

Sometimes it was just to drop off paper work or go over presentation materials, but there were other times too. Like my birthday party, for example. It was a surprise one with all of our friends and family there, organized entirely by the clever Mary Jones.

Maybe that's why I didn't worry when my husband hired her as his secretary. After all, Mary was a plain, mousy woman. Not at all like me.

He insisted she stay, of course. No one remembers her being there, but she stuck out to me as if she were dancing, naked, on a tabletop. She eyed my husband that night and for the first time, I realized he was eyeing her back.

Maybe it was partially my fault. We argued in front of her, talking about personal things as if she wasn't there. I didn't realize until then that they were more than just working friends. It worsened steadily from there. She started spending

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time with the kids. *My* kids. She went to their baseball games, skating practices, and ballet recitals. I'd walk into a room and all discussion would stop and they'd giggle when I walked out.

I'm not exactly sure when I decided to kill them. I don't remember taking the gun out of the safe or driving to the office building in my Mercedes. As I walked up the sidewalk, they came out of the building. He helped her put on her coat, opened the car door, and they hugged. He hadn't done those things for me in months. He was always too busy working. He'd told me it was all to build our savings.

Ah, yes, our savings. There was only *one* thing left for me to save and that was my dignity. So I pulled the gun out of the pocket of my fur coat and moved closer. She saw me first. Those calm, clear eyes widened with fear behind her glasses when she saw the gun. I raised it up; my hand wasn't even trembling, and pulled the trigger.

I missed, of course. He'd never gotten around to showing me how to use the damned gun. That's why I'm here, right officer? My lawyer did what he could, but my husband was always very sneaky, very good at hiding things he didn't want me to find out. So there was no evidence of an affair, no proof that they were going to run off to Rome as lovers.

The last day of my trial, Mary Jones sat in the witness box, her hair pulled up into a bun and those ridiculous librarian glasses perched on her nose, and said the ring and

trip were for *me*! Gifts from a loving husband to a devoted wife and that it had been arranged for her to stay with the children since they liked her so much.

The jury convicted me. Seven of them were men so I wasn't surprised. The prosecutor called me a jealous housewife obsessed with the secretary's youth and beauty. Obsessed with her? They'd played me for a fool and were going to get away with it. Like I said before, my husband is very thorough. I was surprised it took him five years to marry the silly girl.

Don't look so surprised, officer. He divorced me less than a year after I was convicted. The proceedings started that same day. I wonder if he got some kind of bargain on the lawyers' time.

He'll probably take her to France with the money he saved. I should have known the day I met her. After all, you know the old saying don't you, officer?

It's always the quiet ones.

— Julie Harrington

Editor's Note: Julie is the winner of our "Finish the Story" contest. In addition to publication, she will receive a gift certificate to Borders Bookstore.